

# Suicide Prevention Council

c/o NH DHHS Division of Public Health  
29 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301



Child and Family Services  
of NH

Disabilities Rights Center

Elliot Hospital

Genesis Behavioral Health

Injury Prevention Center

NAMI NH

New Futures

NH Association of Counties

NH Community Behavioral  
Health Association

NH Dept. of Corrections

NH Dept. of Education

NH Dept. of Health and  
Human Services

NH Dept. of Safety

NH General Court

NH Hospital Association

NH Medical Society

NH Mental Health Council

NH National Guard

NH State Senate

Office of the Chief Medical  
Examiner

Rockingham County  
Service Link

Survivors of Suicide Loss

VA Medical Center

Youth Suicide Prevention  
Assembly

Ms. Marlene Dortch  
Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20554

June 5, 2017

Dear Ms. Dortch,

The NH Suicide Prevention Council, is legislatively established to oversee implementation of the NH State Suicide Prevention plan and as such is very invested in promoting timely access to mental health care and the prevention of suicide. As the Chairman, and on behalf of the Council, I am writing to urge you to designate a 3-digit N11 phone code as a Suicide Crisis Lifeline.

The time is now to embrace mental and emotional wellness as a national priority and to establish national 3-digit access to crisis intervention services. Suicide death and related human suffering including overdose and mental illness are at record highs in the US. Despite many valuable efforts, our resources cannot meet this level of need. In this environment and at this crucial juncture we urgently need to expand upon the nation's greatest resource for support and self-help to prevent suicide death.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (the Lifeline) network of *certified* community-based call centers is a uniquely valuable service that connects with millions of callers in crisis annually. As recommended by the Congressional special mandate to the Commission, the creation of the Lifeline national behavioral health and suicide N-11 number, makes this service readily accessible, to the benefit of all of America's communities.

In 2004, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration launched the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline as an integrated national effort to reach people in crisis, using the single number 1-800-273-8255 as a uniform access point to connect to crisis services. The Lifeline has been a tremendous success – growing from just a few calls that first year to over 2 million last year, including over 700,000 calls to the national Veterans Crisis Line. This in spite of a long 1-800 number that is not easy to remember and access.

**Three-digit access is a natural next step given the growth and proven effectiveness of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.**

Establishing a three-digit unique N11 number for mental health and suicide prevention will:

- Deliver timely and effective crisis intervention services to millions of Americans
- Make it easier to connect people in need with help
- Meet the *dramatically* growing need for crisis intervention
- Help eliminate the stigma of mental health by normalizing help seeking for mental illness with the same priority we deliver for services like fire and rescue, social service referral, and telecommunication referral for people with hearing disabilities

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline saves lives every day, helping thousands of people each day find a way forward through their darkest moments. Highly trained call counselors, at the linked Veterans Crisis Line and over 160 call centers across the nation, help over 2 million Americans and their families each year cope with the challenges of mental wellness and suicidal crisis. The Lifeline network is proof positive of the power of behavioral health and suicide crisis intervention. Extensive, independent research has proven the effectiveness of crisis intervention by the highly trained counselors of the Lifeline affiliates nationwide.

We believe the recommendation of the North American Numbering Council's (NANC's) report to the FCC to expand the 211 code to include crisis and suicide prevention is ill advised and potentially dangerous. 211 is an information and resource line and NOT a crisis line. Individuals and families need an easy to remember N11 number that is a dedicated mental health and suicide prevention crisis line with answered by individuals who are qualified, trained and certified to effectively respond to mental health emergencies and prevent suicide deaths. These situations are often real emergencies where timely and effective response can mean the difference between life or death. The increasing call volume seen by the Lifeline demonstrates that the public recognizes and utilizes to the Lifeline as a mental health/suicide prevention line. Combining this with 211 would create confusion and miss an important opportunity which was almost unanimously endorsed by Congress to establish a dedicated suicide prevention/mental health crisis line.

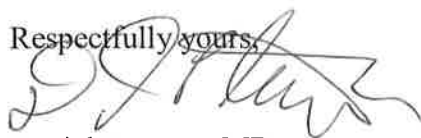
A three-digit access line can help reduce the pervasive stigma associated with mental health challenges. A 3-digit access number for crisis services represents a national recognition that seeking help for behavioral health and suicidal crisis is just as much a part of life as seeking help for fire, for injury, or for other health and wellness needs. Far too many people, including men and young children have been lost to suicide as a direct result of social stigma and discrimination related to mental health struggles.

The FCC is poised to take an important step in addressing suicide as a critical public health issue by designating a 3-digit Behavioral Health and Suicide Crisis Lifeline. As a council dedicated to enhancing mental health and reducing suicide we the NH Suicide Prevention Council urge the FCC to make this designation as a dedicated and unique number for mental health/suicide prevention crisis.

Personally, I would add that as a psychiatrist who has worked with individuals with severe mental health conditions for decades, including Veterans, inpatient, outpatient and incarcerated individuals many of whom are suicidal, I urge the FCC to act to make this life-saving change a reality for our communities. I am convinced that dedicated three-digit access is a crucial opportunity to reach millions of Americans experiencing behavioral health or suicidal crisis.

Thank you very much for your engagement in this issue that affects hundreds of millions of lives in our country every year.

Respectfully yours,



Daniel Potenza, MD

NH Suicide Prevention Council Chairman